

A150 Voices and texts



The Open
University

Study Companion

Orality
Culture
Creative Context
Tradition
Genre
Reflection
Identity
Poetry
Truth
Scripture
Expression
Analysis
Authority
Rhetoric
Discourse
Practice
Song
Recite
Canons
Source
Process
Evaluative
Drama
Translation
Speech Writing
Epic
Disciplines
Authentic
Classics
Language
Narrative
Communication
Dialogue
Reading
Collaboration
Adaptation
Word



Study Companion

Lynda Prescott

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1.1



Study Companion

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1 Introduction

This Study Companion contains most of the materials for your first week's study of A150 *Voices and texts*. However, some of the resources included here, especially the Module guide (Section 2), will be useful to you not just during the first week but also at later points in your study. So you should keep it by you for future reference and guidance.

1.1 Some practical points

How much time should I spend on A150?

You will need to spend an average of 15 hours of study time a week on A150. You will therefore need to work out how best to allocate your time. To help you get started, the table below suggests how much time you might allow for each of the sections in this Study Companion.

Section	Suggested time to allow
1 Introduction and 2 Module guide, including learning outcomes and guide to assessment	1–2 hours, including listening to part of DVD 1
3 What do we mean by 'voices' and 'texts'?	3 hours, including activities and use of online material
4 Working with others	3 hours, including activities, an online quiz and use of tutor-group forum
5 Reflection and assessment	2 hours, including short writing activities
6 Key concepts and processes	1 hour, including an online activity
7 Reflecting on the first week's work	1 hour

This is a very rough guide – you may find yourself taking less time over some parts and more over others, but looking at the overall proportions of the Companion should help you to plan your time during this first week more easily. You will notice that the total number of hours suggested here is actually less than 15: this is because by the time you reach Section 3 you will also need to find and start using the A150 website. So during Week 1 some extra 'orientation' time is built in for the online elements of your work.

The A150 online study planner and the printed study map divide A150 into 20 study weeks, though there is, of course, scope for some individual flexibility in terms of just how you allocate your study time, as long as you observe the cut-off dates for assignments. But it is important to note that in the run-up to Assignment 01, which involves working with other students, you will need to ensure that your own individual schedule fits with that of your fellow students. The study planner has been designed with this in mind, so try to stay close to the official timetable here.

Studying online: using your computer for A150

If you have any queries about your OUCU or password, you can contact the OU Computing Helpdesk by phone (+44 (0)1908 653972), giving your student number (Personal Identifier) and the code 'A150'.

If you have already studied AA100 *The arts past and present* you should find that many online features of A150, such as the website and forums, are fairly familiar. However, there is an important difference, already mentioned, in that the assessment for A150 involves online group-working. You will read more about this in Section 4, but it is important to note right now that you need to use a computer from the very outset. If you have any problems with computer access, you can phone the Open University Library Helpdesk (01908 659001) for information about 'public access computers' in your local area as a temporary solution. Using the internet address <http://www.open.ac.uk/students>, you can access your personal homepage at the University (StudentHome) by entering your Open University Computer Username (or OUCU) and password. Once online, you can find a wealth of information and advice about online study by clicking on 'New to OU Study', then 'Undergraduate', then 'Learning online'.

In terms of using your computer for study, A150 will require you to:

- submit word-processed assignments via the OU's eTMA system, and collect them when they have been marked
- use the A150 website to access online activities or exercises
- regularly use online forums and email to communicate with your fellow students and tutor
- occasionally use the resources on the OU Library website and search the wider internet in a targeted way.

Building on AA100

If you have not studied AA100 you may find it useful to look at an online site (www.open.ac.uk/arts/moving-on-to-a150) where we have assembled some extracts from AA100 to provide relevant

background for your study of A150. This resource may, of course, also be useful to former AA100 students who wish to remind themselves of selected aspects. You will find a link to the 'Moving on to A150' site on the main A150 website.

Wherever you are starting from, we hope you will enjoy the next 20 weeks studying *Voices and texts*.

2 Module guide

2.1 Aims

A150 *Voices and texts* focuses on language in a wide range of contexts, and from the perspective of different academic subjects. ‘Language’ is an immense topic – a crucial part of our individual lives and of human societies in general – and we cannot hope to be comprehensive in our coverage here. However, A150 aims to open up the topic in a way that involves all of us, as language users. And by looking at language from different academic angles, we hope to identify common concerns and points of connection.

A number of the academic subjects here will be familiar to you if you have already studied AA100: Classical Studies, History, Literature, Music and Religious Studies. A150 introduces two additional disciplines: English Language Studies and Creative Writing, which sit alongside Literature under the more general subject heading of ‘English’. The module thus spans a large part of the Arts and Humanities programme, and we hope you will find this variety stimulating.

Like AA100, A150 is interdisciplinary. Using the term ‘discipline’ to describe an academic subject suggests that it is possible to approach that subject in a systematic, ordered way. One of our aims is to develop your sense of what distinguishes, say, studying History from studying Literature, or Religious Studies from Classical Studies, quite apart from the different subject matter in each area. At the same time, we recognise that in the field of Arts and Humanities significant overlaps in subject matter often occur, and it can be very illuminating to approach a topic using the insights of different disciplines in a complementary way. So while you are building up your understanding of the approaches to knowledge and understanding that each separate discipline cultivates – or, in the language of learning outcome 3 (see Section 2.3), its ‘methodology’ – you should also become more alert to the value of interdisciplinary study.

A150 builds on AA100 in a variety of ways. The learning skills developed through study of AA100 will stand you in good stead on A150, and, in particular, reflection will be foregrounded in the assessment activities as a means of enhancing learning. But where AA100 is introductory, allowing time for features such as discovering how to organise your study time effectively, A150 assumes that you

have already established good study habits, and introduces some additional features, notably collaborative learning and an examination at the end of the module. So a key aim of A150 is to consolidate and extend your learning skills.

Following on from this, the final aim of A150 is to help you to prepare for studies at OU Level 2 by giving you opportunities to hone your analytical skills and to develop new approaches to your own writing. By the time you reach the end of A150 you will have had considerable practice in analysing texts of various kinds, sometimes from more than one angle, and through paying attention to different facets of language you will have had plentiful opportunities to refine your skills of 'close reading'. You will also have practised several kinds of writing, from formal academic essays to more exploratory writing exercises, and so your 'writing muscles' should be more flexible.

2.2 Materials and content

A150 consists of printed, audio-visual and online materials.

Printed materials

- Study Companion
- Books:
 - Book 1, *The Voices and Texts of Authority*, edited by Lynda Prescott
 - Book 2, *Identity and Expression*, edited by Philip Seargeant
 - Book 3, *Voices and Texts in Dialogue*, edited by Donna Loftus
- Set book: Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, edited by Kate Flint, Penguin, ISBN 978-0-14-143967-9
- Assignment Booklet
- Study map.

After your first week of study, in which this Study Companion introduces you to some of the major themes of *Voices and texts*, you will move on to the first of three books containing the remainder of the study material. Each book covers four weeks of study, with assessment weeks in between the books.

Book 1: *The Voices and Texts of Authority*

Each book begins with a fairly substantial introduction, which sets up the theme of the book as well as outlining the contents, so time devoted to the introductions will be time well spent. The Introduction to Book 1 offers an initial and broad-based exploration of the theme of authority and associated concepts; then, in the four chapters that follow, we turn to examples from Religious Studies, Literature, Music and Classical Studies, to see how the idea of authority can be viewed in each of these fields. Chapters 1 and 2 examine how authority is sometimes conferred on texts through establishing canons, or lists of ‘approved’, recognised works. These chapters discuss religious, literary and musical canons, both in general terms and through more detailed case studies. Once we begin to look ‘behind the scenes’ at the process of canon formation, we find ourselves drawn into debates about the nature of authority as it is expressed in the concept of canons and the closely related notion of ‘classics’. In the second half of Book 1, canonical ancient Greek texts provide the link between the chapters, as we examine first Homer’s *Iliad*, with resonances in modern poetry, and then a South African drama, *The Island*, based in part on Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Through these examples we see how creative possibilities – and tensions – can arise when contemporary artists draw on and ‘remake’ the authority invested in classical texts.

Book 2: *Identity and Expression*

Two new disciplines are introduced in Book 2: English Language Studies and Creative Writing. English Language Studies has as its main focus the theoretical analysis of human language and language use. Chapters on ‘Speech and dialect’ and ‘Writing and register’ examine the communicative process through a variety of examples, focusing on the relationship between language and identity, and the ways language is used in different social settings. Then we move to Creative Writing, with a chapter on ‘Invented voices’ examining in more detail the artifice involved in representing ‘constructed’ rather than actual voices. Book 2’s final chapter, ‘Poetic voices’, investigates a further distinction: between the language of prose, and the language of more experimental prose and of poetry. You will have the opportunity to use creative writing strategies to experiment with ways of shaping language.

Book 3: *Voices and Texts in Dialogue*

In the final part of A150 the disciplines of History and Literature come together in a case study centred on mid-Victorian Britain. Book 3

begins in Manchester in the 1840s, and introduces the topic of industrialisation, with a particular focus on the way that ideas about social order were produced and exchanged. This first chapter shows how industry and society were described, issues that are then followed through in a discussion of Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times* (1854). The central chapters of the book open up a number of different approaches to reading nineteenth-century fiction, including understanding the conventions of the genre, as well as the relationship between Dickens's novel and the society in which it was produced. In the final chapter more historical sources from the 1850s and 1860s will be added to the textual mix, to explore how political culture gave voice to some and not to others. Throughout the book you will develop your skills in intertextual reading as you trace themes and tropes across a range of different source materials.

There is one **set book**, which you'll need to buy and read before you begin working on Book 3:

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, Penguin, ISBN 978-0-14-143967-9

Although there are, of course, many other editions of Dickens's novel, we particularly recommend this paperback, with its introduction by Kate Flint and notes that you'll find useful as you study the novel in more detail.

The **Assignment Booklet** contains the assignment questions themselves, and dates when they are due, information about how to submit your assignments, grading criteria, and advice about how to use your tutor's feedback. You will also find in the Assignment Booklet an overview of the A150 assessment structure, and details of how your overall result is arrived at.

The **study map** is a poster that provides in graphic form some of the material available in the online study planner, to give you a visual sense of where you are in the module and what you need to do next.

Audio-visual materials

- DVD 1
- DVD 2
- DVD 3.

The three DVDs contain material relating to Books 1, 2 and 3 respectively. As you work through the books, you will be directed to audio and/or video material on the appropriate DVD.

Online materials

As mentioned in Section 1, the A150 website, accessible from your StudentHome page, will be central to your study. It provides links to a wide variety of resources, including the study planner, and also gives you access to the online forums, where you can talk to other A150 students, both informally and as part of the assessment for A150. (You will read more about this in Section 4). As you come to the end of each of A150's three books, you will also find on the study planner a 'consolidation' quiz associated with that book.

2.3 Learning outcomes

You are probably aware that learning outcomes for any given course of study state what you are expected to know, understand and be able to do by the end of it. So they act as a guide, setting you clear goals, and enabling you to articulate key points about your learning development. The assessment for A150 is designed with these learning outcomes in mind, so we hope you will see each assessment task as an integral part of working towards your learning goals.

We can group the learning outcomes under four headings:

Knowledge and understanding

- 1 You will develop your understanding of the features of text-based study common to a number of academic disciplines.
- 2 You will know how to distinguish between different concepts of voice.
- 3 You will have developed your understanding of different methodological approaches to the concepts 'voices' and 'texts'.

Cognitive skills

- 4 You will have developed your skills of analysing spoken and written texts.
- 5 You will have developed a reflective awareness of issues surrounding the acts of writing and translating.
- 6 You will have developed an evaluative approach to your own writing, as well as to texts written by others.

7 You will have developed your ability to draft, edit and polish original creative writing, and your understanding of the creative process involved.

Key skills

8 You will have developed your skills in communicating ideas clearly, appropriately to your subject, purpose and audience.

9 You will have developed your skills in working co-operatively with others.

10 You will have practised the constructive use of reflection.

Practical and/or professional skills

11 You will have developed your information literacy skills in finding, selecting and using information in defined contexts.

12 You will have developed your ability to work on analytical tasks within a restricted time-scale.

13 You will have developed an enhanced self-awareness of and confidence in your own transferable skills, and reflected on how these skills might be used in new situations.

This list of learning outcomes underpins the way that A150 is designed, and you will be encouraged, in the course of your studies, to reflect on how you are progressing towards the achievement of these outcomes. But at the same time, since learning is an individual process, you may find that as you continue your studies you learn all kinds of things that are not listed in the formal learning outcomes. For example, you may find that particular elements prompt you to think of connections with something you already know or can already do. This is often a very productive study experience, perhaps just as satisfying in its own way as the excitement of discovering something new. So, as you periodically review your progress, do also leave yourself space to reflect on learning that may fall outside the planned list of outcomes, especially where you sense possibilities for further development.

The final point to make here about learning outcomes for A150 is that they contribute to broader learning aims linked to whole qualifications. And indeed the transferable skills to which learning outcome 13 refers might relate to further studies, as well as to other aspects of your life

where it is helpful to be able to draw on skills you have acquired through your OU studies.

Whether you are studying for a certificate, a diploma, a degree in a named subject or an Open degree, A150 aims to encourage you to be open to new possibilities and to develop enthusiasm for what you are studying.

2.4 Tuition

A150 is taught through a range of media, though given the subject matter there is considerable emphasis on print and audio materials. Another very important element in the tuition mix is the contact you will have with your tutor (or Associate Lecturer) and with other students, through face-to-face and/or online tutorials. Your tutor will offer individualised support and guidance, sometimes using telephone or email contact, but most importantly by providing feedback on your assignments. The group dimension of tuition on A150 centres on the tutorial sessions, organised by your tutor and catering for your group of, on average, twenty students. The actual balance of face-to-face and online tutorials will vary slightly from region to region, and in some areas it may be possible to offer longer face-to-face events, or day schools, involving more than one tutor. As always, tutorial attendance is not compulsory but it is highly desirable. Being able to pursue ideas and practise your academic skills in the company of your tutor and fellow students is a valuable part of your overall study experience.

As mentioned in Section 1.1, you will be working in a small team with fellow students for Assignment 01. Your tutor will be on hand to help your team settle in and approach the task, so you can expect to have fairly frequent contact with her/him during the opening weeks of the module. But another difference between A150 and AA100 is that, because A150 is not an 'introductory' module in the style of AA100, there is not the same degree of interaction between tutor and student. You will probably notice this slight change of gear after Assignment 01, but we hope that in the process of working closely with fellow students for that assignment, you will have built supportive connections so that you can continue friendly exchanges of ideas online, learning with and from each other throughout.

2.5 Assessment

You will see from the Assignment Booklet that assessment is divided between assignments marked and graded by your tutor – there are three of these, one for each book – and a final examination. It is important that you study the whole of A150: with only three assignments, missing any one of them would make it difficult for you to achieve your learning outcomes, and undermine your chances of achieving a pass mark in your continuous assessment scores. Similarly, the exam will include questions relating to each part, so you would be putting yourself at a severe disadvantage if you were to skip large sections of the material.

Having sounded those warning notes, though, we should also say that the assessment is designed not just to test your progress, but also to offer valuable learning opportunities. The three assignments are different in nature, but each involves an element of reflection, to encourage your self-awareness as a learner. The most substantial of these comes in Assignment 01, to enable you to review the process of collaborative group-working that you have been engaging in (constructing a wiki with a group of fellow students, based on your work for Book 1). Assignments 02 and 03, linked to Books 2 and 3 respectively, are of a more conventional kind, but again you will have the opportunity to reflect on your own learning as part of the assignment.

The examination is designed as a test of skills rather than memory, and, if you have worked steadily through A150, the main challenge in the exam will probably be to work within a restricted time-scale (see learning outcome 12, above). So, because this may be the first exam you have taken at the OU, the time pressure is relaxed a little: the exam paper is designed as one that can be comfortably completed within two hours, but you will actually have three hours to work on it in the examination room. Several questions will provide passages of text and invite you to analyse them, putting into practice some of the skills you have been developing throughout your studies. Guidance on responding to these kinds of question, and preparing for the exam more generally, will appear on the A150 website as you approach exam time. You will also receive feedback on your exam performance, to help prepare you for OU Level 2 studies, where exams often feature in the assessment structure.

2.6 DVD 1: 'Introducing *Voices and texts*'

To complete the outline of A150 contained in this Module guide, you should now listen to the short audio compilation 'Introducing *Voices and texts*' on DVD 1. In this piece some of A150's authors give a personal perspective on their own work as subject specialists and talk about some of the texts you will encounter in Books 1, 2 and 3. There are also short extracts from other pieces of audio material you will hear as you work your way through the three books, to illustrate something of A150's range and diversity.

3 What do we mean by 'voices' and 'texts'?

As you work through this section you will be starting to focus on learning outcomes 1 and 2:

- You will develop your understanding of the features of text-based study common to a number of academic disciplines.
- You will know how to distinguish between different concepts of 'voice' and 'text'.

3.1 Learning through activities

The terms 'voice' and 'text' are multifaceted, both having a wide range of possible meanings, in everyday speech and in academic usage. During your study of A150 you will encounter the two words used in a variety of ways, in connection with different subjects, and they won't always mean exactly the same thing. One of the best ways to explore their shifting meanings and associations is through engaging in activities where you can see the terms being used, and this is what we are about to do. If you have already studied with The Open University you will be familiar with the 'activity-and-discussion' format used here. The 'activity' heading signals a change of gear in your study, as you switch from reading to doing something yourself: in other words, you become a more active learner. So you should try to do as many of the activities as possible, as a way of developing new skills and consolidating new understandings.

Again, if you are an experienced OU student, you will be aware that different kinds of activities invite different kinds of responses, and some take longer than others. You will find a wide range of activities embedded in the A150 teaching materials, and although for some of these you just need to pause for a few minutes and jot down quick responses to a specific question, there are others where you will need to set aside rather more time to work on a more complex task. How long you spend on an activity will, of course, vary enormously according to your circumstances, interests, etc. However, for activities on which you will need to spend more than a few minutes, or for which you might need to read extra materials or use audio or video resources (which may be of variable lengths), we have suggested roughly how much time you should allow. Where a timing is not given, you should assume that you

need to spend no longer than 10–15 minutes on the task. The total time you spend on any activity will, of course, include reading the follow-up discussion, and perhaps reflecting on your initial response in the light of that discussion. Even when you are pressed for time and tempted to skip an activity, do try to pause over the question, and make a note or two to clarify your response, before moving on to the discussion section.

In Sections 3.2 and 3.3, we will introduce some short activities based on the printed materials here. Then in Section 3.4 you will need to access some audio material from the A150 website for a longer and more complex activity.

3.2 Voice

Having said that the word ‘voice’ is multifaceted, it might be helpful now to differentiate between some of these usages. As a first step, we can distinguish between literal and metaphorical usages. A metaphor is a type of figurative language that describes one thing by comparing it to another thing. We find explicit forms of comparison in similes, which include words such as ‘like’ or ‘as’. But metaphors omit the ‘like’ or ‘as’ stage, and foreground the common qualities of the things compared in a way that is sometimes striking, but sometimes so ‘natural’ as to be unremarkable. When we are reading poetry, we may be more self-consciously on the alert for figurative language in general, and thus metaphors specifically. For example, D.H. Lawrence, evoking an Italian evening in his poem ‘Bat’, refers to ‘the tired flower of Florence’ (Muldoon, 1997, p. 95); in comparing the city to a flower he implies a shared quality of beauty, and perhaps also – more unexpectedly – fragility. But everyday language is full of metaphor, too. When we talk about ‘the leg of a table’ or a ‘branch of an organisation’, we are using metaphors probably without noticing them, because they have become such familiar elements in our language. ‘Voice’ is often used in this everyday-metaphorical sense. We’ll pause on this point so that you can consider it for yourself.

Activity

In each of the sentences below, decide whether the word ‘voice’ is used literally or metaphorically:

- (a) He spoke in a soft, soothing voice.
- (b) The members spoke with one voice in rejecting the new proposal.

- (c) Tenor voices are in short supply in our local choir.
- (d) We were startled by the sudden voice of thunder.
- (e) I had a bad bout of laryngitis and lost my voice.
- (f) I took a Creative Writing course and found my voice.

Discussion

When we're trying to pin down literal uses of the word 'voice' we're on the look-out for meanings where a connection with sounds and vocal organs is not too far away. Sentence (a) fits this requirement clearly, and so does (e). I've also included sentence (c) in my list of literal usages, though 'voice' here is acquiring a more specialised musical sense. What about sentences (b), (d) and (f)? Noticing the reference to speech in sentence (b), we might be inclined to think that 'voice' is used literally here, too. But since people (plural) can't actually speak with one voice (singular), I think we're in the realms of comparison: several or many people are speaking as if they just have one voice between them – that is, unanimously. In sentence (d) we have a clear connection with sound, but this particular sound isn't produced through vocal organs, so I'd choose metaphorical rather than literal for the 'voice of thunder'. That leaves us with sentence (f), and here 'voice' seems to be related to expressing oneself in writing rather than through speech, so again the usage seems more metaphorical than literal.

There is much more that could be said about voices in the literal sense, including the way that they convey individuality, but this will be one of the topics addressed in Book 2, *Identity and Expression*, so for now we will continue to explore different usages of 'voice' by turning our attention to metaphorical usage.

Activity

Think for a moment about the list of phrases below. Some of them may be familiar, some unfamiliar. Starting from what you know, or might guess, about the phrases, can you spot any links or common features? (If you are a keen internet user, and have time to do this, you might try typing any of the unfamiliar ones into a search engine to see what comes up.)

- (a) The voice of the people
- (b) Vox populi
- (c) The voice of the oppressed

(d) The Voice of America

(e) American Voice.

Discussion

'The voice of the people' is a widely used phrase in which 'voice' generally means the expressed opinion – often a political opinion – of a group of people viewed as a united whole. 'Vox populi' is the Latin version of 'voice of the people', and we often hear it in its abbreviated form, 'vox pop' – a broadcasting term used to refer to interviews with the general public, or the 'man/woman in the street'. Both these phrases, like sentence (b) in the previous activity, attribute a single voice to a group of people, and although 'vox pop' interviews present us with individuals, they are usually anonymous, seen as representatives of 'the people' in general. The same idea of 'representation' crops up in phrase (c), 'the voice of the oppressed'. This is a more specialised phrase that we might find in certain kinds of political writings, sometimes in variant versions such as 'a voice for the oppressed' or 'giving voice to the oppressed'. The difference here is that 'the oppressed' are usually conceived of as not having voices, so someone else must speak for them, or create the conditions in which they can be heard.

Some of you may have recognised 'The Voice of America' as the name of the official radio and television broadcasting service of the United States government. 'American Voice' is also the name of a radio network, a self-styled alternative to the government's service. In phrases (d) and (e) the concept of voice is very firmly linked to broadcast media, as well as to a political context. Political and/or media associations have cropped up in all our examples here, suggesting that the idea of 'voice' has considerable potency in relation to representation, to rights of expression, and means of expression.

I have focused here on some common and widely understood meanings of the term 'voice'. Later in *Voices and texts* you will encounter further ideas about voice and voices, with different nuances of meaning, and different associations, according to the contexts within which they are used. As you might expect, when you move further into each of the subject areas featured in A150, some of the discussion will also become more specialised. Sometimes, then, you will encounter technical terms, or (more trickily) everyday-sounding terms such as 'voice' used in a specialised way. When you come across a word highlighted in bold, you'll know that this is such a term, and you can find a definition in the glossary section at the end of the book. You don't need to memorise all

of these definitions: the glossaries are there so that you can easily look up subject-specific terms and think about their particular meanings.

3.3 Text

We'll approach the multifaceted term 'text' in a slightly different way.

Activity

Invent a few sentences that include the word 'text' or 'texts', varying the meaning with each example. Aim to produce four or five sentences before you go on to read the discussion below.

Discussion

When I tried this activity, I found myself preoccupied with questions about length. Perhaps this was because the first two examples that came into my mind were radically different: one was the text message from a friend that popped up in my mobile phone's inbox today, about a dozen words in length, and the other was the Dickens novel *Hard Times*, about three hundred pages long, that is sitting on my desk because it is a set text for A150. Did your examples also span an enormous range in terms of size? What other variations emerged? And did any of your examples take you outside the realm of writing/written words?

'Text' is certainly a term that we encounter frequently in an academic context. My example of Dickens's novel illustrates the fact that in literary studies people are forever talking about texts. Historians, though, are more likely to refer to original writings as 'documents' or 'sources'. In both areas, 'text' refers to something written, and this is often, though by no means always, the case.

So let us try coming at the issue from a different angle and ask what counts as a text in relation to different academic subjects. The most inclusive approach I can think of is that of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who viewed cultural practices – any cultural practices – as texts: in his essay 'Deep play: notes on the Balinese cockfight' he laid claim to a very generous interpretation of 'text' in asserting that 'the culture of a people is an ensemble of texts' (Geertz, 1975, p. 452). Even if we narrow the range of possibilities to rule out cock-fighting and other activities, we often find things that have been made, though not made from words, being studied as texts on academic courses. It is perfectly

appropriate, in certain contexts, to refer to buildings, paintings and many other kinds of objects, as 'texts'. But very often the texts we study in academic courses are made of words, and for the most part those words are written. On A150 you will be dealing with both written words and spoken words, and although the texts that you study will cover a very wide range, they will all be language-based.

3.4 Speeches and speech-making

You will need access to a computer for this section of the Study Companion.

To round off this initial exploration of our key terms, we will look at an aspect of language use where voices and texts converge. The ancient art of rhetoric, in which a speaker employs eloquent devices to achieve persuasive effects, was an important element of a university education in the Middle Ages, and it is still very much alive today in the public sphere. Speeches by figures such as politicians are usually carefully crafted affairs, designed to be spoken, but relying on a written script. Analysing the construction of a speech, and its manner of delivery, can give interesting insights into the techniques of rhetoric, but what matters most of all in any situation where a speech is being made is the audience. The audience, and therefore the context for and the purpose in speaking, will shape not only what is said, but how it is said.

The idea of 'audience' is, of course, crucial in any form of communication, and as you work through A150 you will frequently be thinking about the audiences (or readers) for written texts. But for the purposes of the next activity we will move away from the printed page so that we can listen to some examples of famous speeches, and begin to analyse their effects. You will need to access the A150 website, which you can reach from StudentHome by clicking on your 'Course' tab. In the central panel of the website, where the study planner lists your topics week by week, go to the Week 1 section and open the link for Activity 1. The activity incorporates short audio recordings and commentaries that you will be able to listen to via your computer, and questions to guide your listening.

4 Working with others

As you work through this section you will be starting to focus on learning outcome 9:

- You will have developed your skills in working co-operatively with others.

4.1 Learning through discussion

Although The Open University is a distance-learning institution it also provides a number of learning opportunities for students that break down the barriers of distance. During your study of A150 we hope that you will be able to take advantage of the opportunity to meet, and work with, your tutor and other students at face-to-face events organised in your region or nation. But there will also be plentiful opportunities to 'meet' with fellow students, under the guidance of your tutor, through the integrated online facilities.

4.2 Working with your fellow students online

Over the last few years, as 'virtual learning environments' (or VLEs) have become increasingly common features of higher education outside the OU as well as inside it, a great deal of evidence has built up about the value of online facilities that enable students to contact each other 'virtually', without the need to be in the same place at the same time. A couple of comments from students on the 'Study at the OU' website illustrate how useful these online links can be for distance learners, in particular:

You will need access to a computer for this section of the Study Companion.

The Tutor Group Forum was very actively participated in, which helped us to study as a group although we were miles apart.

(student on B120 *Introduction to business studies*)

The forums gave a sense of community which helped when I was struggling and on many occasions the forums kept me going!

(student on K101 *An introduction to health and social care*)

Since A150 is thoroughly preoccupied with language, we'll pause for just a moment to consider the term 'forum', which is used in these quotations. Like all new technologies, the internet has spawned entire new vocabularies, some parts of which are still colliding with each other before they settle down. In 'forum' you may recognise a historical reference to an open place, such as the famous Forum in Rome, where people could gather for public discussion and debate. Online forums offer the same kind of discussion opportunities, though of course there is no 'wandering in off the street': you have to be a member of a designated community, such as your OU tutor-group, to be able to access the forums we use here. 'Forum' has replaced 'conference', an earlier name for this type of online community (appropriately, in my view, since 'conference' implies a more formal kind of assembly than the kind we are aiming for in A150). Meanwhile, other phrases such as 'message boards' and 'chat rooms' jostle for attention, too, making their claims for online group facilities as either mainly functional or mainly social spaces.

These are all viable uses, but we need some kind of common understanding of what A150's forums are for, in order to use them appropriately. I've already suggested that forums are relatively informal (less formal than 'conferences', anyway), but because we are using them for clearly focused study purposes, I'd also like to suggest that we see A150's forums as something a little more formal, or more purposeful, than spaces for 'chat'. Having said that, though, you will find that different functions are allocated to different forum-areas. You may well find yourself spending time in 'café' areas, which are deliberately social, as well as in more structured areas where A150 themes and tasks can be pursued with the kind of relaxed formality you might expect in a face-to-face tutorial.

All A150's online forums are gathered together on the A150 website, which by now you should be able to access fairly easily from StudentHome. Scroll down the left-hand panel of the website, past 'News' and 'Resources' until you come to the heading 'Forums'.

Activity

Now post a short message to your tutor-group forum. It is likely that your tutor will already have set up one or more 'threads' or 'discussion topics', and if there is one with a heading that suggests this is the place for introductions, open that by clicking on the appropriate line. You can then read any messages already posted there, before clicking on a 'reply' tab

to start your own message, or 'posting'. Your message can be very short – the equivalent of saying 'hello' in a face-to-face tutorial – but it will give you an opportunity to make initial contact with other members of your group. This, in turn, will make it much easier to start participating in the introductory online activities that will lead you into your work for Assignment 01.

Discussion

Since the online forums are asynchronous, with people logging on and off at different times, you may not receive an immediate response to your first posting, but try to establish a routine of checking the forums for unread messages each time you open the A150 website. Meanwhile, if you want to read more about this mode of communication, while you have your tutor-group forum open, look on the right-hand side of the screen above the list of discussion topics, and click on the 'Guide to forums' (you should see a question-mark inside a blue circle alongside this link). You can return to this Guide when starting to use a wiki with your team of fellow students for Assignment 01.

4.3 What will I gain from working with others?

We hope that you will enjoy exchanging ideas with fellow students in your tutor-group forum. (You may already have worked this way on other OU courses of study, including AA100.) But A150's learning outcome 9 suggests that working co-operatively with others is not simply another way of enhancing your learning, but is an important skill in its own right. So at this point you may be asking yourself the question that heads this section (and, since developing a questioning approach to your learning is another important element in being an effective student, that would actually be quite a good thing to do!).

We can begin our search for an answer by quoting from AA100's Course Companion (p. 33):

One of the advantages of studying with The Open University is that it allows you to work independently – and the ability to do this is valued in a whole range of employment contexts. OU students are often praised for being self-starters and self-motivators, and for their ability to see tasks through without close supervision. Being good at your job, however, is also likely to involve working effectively as part of a team: collaborating, sharing ideas, negotiating joint understanding and making collective

decisions. The tuition provided on *The arts past and present* is designed to help you cultivate these transferable team-working skills.

A150 builds on AA100 in this respect, making team-working part of the assessment, and thus raising the profile of this particular skill. It might be worth noting, too, that group-learning is a standard and increasingly prominent aspect of many Higher Education courses. If you have browsed around 'Skills for OU Study' on StudentHome, you may have noticed that there is a section called 'Working with Others', which includes selected links to external websites as well as OU ones. Here is what the University of Warwick advises students in its 'Moving On' materials:

Working co-operatively with others can create wonderful opportunities to share ideas and to gain new perspectives and points of view through tapping into a wider pool of experience and knowledge.

(Collaborative Widening Participation Project, n.d)

In fact, in the OU context, that 'wider pool of experience and knowledge' is likely to be a very valuable resource indeed, since the age-range, and therefore the life experiences, of any group of OU students will probably be greater than those of an average group of students at a conventional university. You may well find that you bring a lot of relevant team-working skills to your A150 studies, and whether those skills have been acquired systematically or in a more ad hoc fashion (as is the case for many of us), they can be applied very constructively in an academic context. Team-working is one of the most 'transferable' of skills.

Transferability works in more than one direction, of course, and you may be keen to take from your experience of team-working on A150 skills that will be helpful in the context of paid employment, or in any other situation where you may find yourself involved in group-work. The kinds of skills that are often listed as valuable for 'employability' can be put to equally good use in voluntary organisations, community groups, etc. So the answer to the question 'What will I gain from working with others?' will vary from person to person, but it is likely to have relevance not only to your OU studies but also to other aspects of your life.

4.4 What are the differences between conventional and online group-work?

A great deal of the study advice you will find in resources such as the University of Warwick's 'Moving On' website refers to the kind of face-to-face group-work that students in conventional universities might find themselves doing. The OU situation is different, not least because you may not meet the other members of your group in person. If you are able to attend the face-to-face tutorials for your group, then you probably will meet some of your fellow team-members, and this would certainly get you off to a good start. But much of your contact will be virtual, conducted through the medium of online forums. This way of working brings its own special demands, but there is still a lot of overlap between the two methods. To find out just how much overlap, you should go now to Quiz 1 on the A150 website, which appears as a link within Week 1. Here you will find skills for group-working broken down into a list of different elements. This list is taken from the BBC Key Skills website linked to the 'Working with Others' section on 'Skills for OU Study', and the quiz prompts you to think about how specific aspects of working with others in a face-to-face setting might be translated into team-working via online forums.

You will need access to a computer for this section of the Study Companion.

4.5 The individual and the team

To round off this section on group-working, we will briefly consider the differences between a group of individuals who are working together, maybe temporarily, and a team. Another of the external websites linked to the 'Skills for OU Study' website, this time from a commercial organisation, provides a list of 'good team' features that we can use as a basis for thinking about the individual and the team. (I have added (a), (b), etc. to the list for ease of reference in the discussion.)

Activity

Read the following list of qualities that characterise a good team, and think about how far each item matches or doesn't match your own views about what makes a team work well. Then select two or three items that you agree with, and, from those, choose one to which you personally feel you would need to pay special attention when working in a team.

(a) Has a shared vision – it knows what it wants to achieve.

- (b) Puts the desired team outcome first: individual interests take a secondary place.
- (c) Is clear about targets and priorities – and agrees these together.
- (d) Can make decisions.
- (e) Has members with different strengths, who can make different contributions.
- (f) Includes all members, everybody counts, efforts are made to ensure that nobody feels left out or undervalued.

(Skills4Study, 2010)

Discussion

This activity invited you to make a personal response, and everyone's response will be a little bit different. You probably noticed, as you were thinking about this list, that items (b), (e) and (f) draw particular attention to the 'individual versus team' dimension of group-working. Whether or not you agree with the precise wording of these points, you would probably agree that effective group-working requires each team member to acknowledge and respect the contributions of others, as well as making the best individual contribution he or she can.

Items (a), (c) and (d) focus on the collective qualities of a good team, though as I thought about these I did start wondering about leadership. Significantly, the list above says nothing about a good team needing a leader. And in fact for a team to function well in the context we are envisaging here it is by no means necessary to have a designated leader. Most teams benefit, though, from the presence of individuals with skills in facilitation, for whom items (e) and (f) are important, and who can help the team negotiate its decisions effectively simply by ensuring that everyone is listened to. In a small group such as the teams in which you will be working for Assignment 01, roles can be fairly flexible. But each team will probably want to follow the general principle of breaking down the assignment into sub-tasks so that everyone has roughly equal responsibility for the end-product, though bearing in mind item (e) in the list, individual contributions may be of different kinds.

In an academic context, team-working offers tremendous opportunities for open discussion and the exchange of different views. You will know that all OU courses of study are the product of team-work, and as you heard in the audio piece 'Introducing *Voices and texts*' those of us who work in such teams can vouch for the value of this approach. We hope you will find it as enriching as we do.

5 Reflection and assessment

As you work through this section you will be starting to focus on learning outcomes 6 and 10:

- You will have developed an evaluative approach to your own writing, as well as to texts written by others.
- You will have practised the constructive use of reflection.

5.1 Learning through reflection

The importance of reflection as part of the process of learning is widely accepted, across courses and modules of many different kinds, at all levels. Being a reflective learner is part and parcel of becoming an independent learner, able to shape your personal approach to your studies in the most effective ways. Learning through reflection is one of the principles guiding the assessment strategy of AA100, so this general idea is likely to be familiar to you already. Here again, A150 builds on AA100, although there are some differences in approach, governed by the nature of the work you will be doing.

5.2 What kind of reflection?

We'll begin here by considering the differences between the 'common sense' view of reflection – as just another kind of thinking – and the more directed sort of reflection required in an academic context. The educationalist Jennifer Moon notes that we generally use the everyday kind of reflection in order to achieve a specific outcome, though sometimes by simply 'being reflective' that outcome may be an unexpected one. Reflection is something that we apply to fairly complex issues ('we do not reflect on the route to the bus-stop, or how to do a simple arithmetical sum where there is an obvious solution') but it is often a matter of reorganising things that we already know, and possibly how we feel about them, in order to reach further insights (Moon, 2006, pp. 36–7).

In some respects, reflection applied in academic contexts is simply a development of this 'common sense' view. As with the everyday variety, this more specialised form of reflection involves outcomes, though they might be more directed, in accordance with a stated purpose. 'Furthermore, the outcome of reflection, which is most likely to be reflective writing, is usually seen by a tutor, and is often assessed ... In

addition, evidence of learning or change of behaviour might be expected to result from the process of reflection' (Moon, 2006, p. 37).

Two of the myths about reflection in an academic context that Moon sets out to dispel are that 'emotion is central to reflective processes' and that 'reflection is about "my own" processes ... in other words, it is always about the role of the "first person" (I ...)' (Moon, 2006, p. 38). The role of emotion in the learning process, or the 'affective dimension' as it is sometimes called, is certainly an interesting one. When we embark on any learning process, we open ourselves up to the possibility of change, and sometimes changes in our knowledge and understanding may prompt changes in the way we feel about things, too. Reflection can help us to monitor any such movements, but this is not the same as saying that reflection is always characterised by emotional involvement. In fact, the kind of reflection that helps us to understand our own learning in a holistic way is likely to involve an element of detachment, as we stand back from our learning experiences in order to think about them more deeply. When we reach this stage, it is usually possible to identify and acknowledge the role of feelings in the process of learning. And what follows from this is that we become more self-aware, and therefore more confident, as learners.

Where does this leave us in terms of the second reflection 'myth', that 'reflection is about "my own" processes'? One possible answer is that yes, reflection usually starts from a personal perspective, but it doesn't have to stop there. Another educationalist who has written extensively on this topic notes that 'Reflection and critical thinking ... have to contain moments of the creation of imaginary alternatives' (Barnett, 1997, p. 6). Creativity and imagination are sometimes underrated as learning tools, but they allow us to think more expansively, taking us beyond the limits of our own situation. In the context of reflection, it is easy to see how mulling over one's own experience can lead, through the exercise of imagination, to considering how other people might feel and behave in similar situations. Looking at imaginary alternatives, from different perspectives, can help us to generalise, and thus base our judgements on broader foundations. The first person (I) may be the starting-point for this kind of reflection, but is not the end-point.

5.3 Reflective writing

The usual outcome of reflection in academic contexts is, as Moon says, reflective writing, and thinking about the role of the first person (I)

leads us naturally into thinking about how, in reflective writing, we might approach the grammatical role of the first person (I). In academic writing, a personal style that involves frequent use of the first-person singular ('I', 'me', 'my') is often discouraged, and some of you may feel hesitant about producing writing for academic purposes that requires you to use first-person vocabulary. However, as you will already have gathered from the brief description of A150's assessment requirements in Section 2.5 of this Study Companion, the assignments include a variety of tasks, and so you will be employing a variety of different writing styles appropriate to these tasks. Reflective writing will have a different 'feel' from the style of a formal essay; and the kind of writing exercises you will engage in when you reach the second half of Book 2, where we focus on Creative Writing, will be different again. As a way of exercising your 'writing muscles', you are invited to experiment with some short writing exercises, based on the topic of reflection.

Activity

Look back to the beginning of this section, where we considered the relationship between the 'common sense' view of reflection and reflection used in an academic context. Write half-a-dozen sentences describing this relationship in your own words, with your own examples, using the first person (I). Be prepared to take time over this (allow between 10 and 20 minutes), as you would when drafting work for an assignment.

Discussion

You probably noticed that the way this activity was framed steered you towards a relatively formal kind of writing (in complete sentences, and as if for an assignment) even though you were taking a personal perspective by using the first person. The point of this was really just to reinforce the idea that academic writing can encompass personal perspectives, and indeed it may be simpler and clearer to do this through the use of the first person. (Compare, for example, 'I decided to ...' with 'It was decided to ...'.)

Making the decision to write in the first person will depend very much on the purpose for which you are writing. In the activity above, you were specifically asked to take this approach. And when you come to write reflective commentaries as part of your A150 assignments, since you are being invited to consider your own learning processes, first-person structures will be appropriate. If you are not already comfortable

with this particular style of writing, with practice you soon will be. The same applies to all kinds of writing, and sometimes the best kind of practice you can have is the practice of rewriting.

Activity

Look back at the piece you wrote for the previous activity, and try to evaluate it in terms of its degree of formality. Does it strike you as conversational in its tone, or is it closer to the kind of style you generally use for an academic essay? Wherever your piece falls on this style spectrum, try now to rewrite it so that it shifts slightly in the other direction. What if you feel that your original piece struck a happy balance between formality and informality? In that case, try rewriting your sentences using a more conventionally academic impersonal style that avoids use of 'I' and related words, and monitor the effect of these changes.

Discussion

You will no doubt have thought about other aspects of style besides the use of 'I' – other vocabulary choices, sentence structures, and so on. You will probably have noticed that one kind of change tends to trigger others, so that the overall style of your piece remains consistent. And it is just possible that, in rewriting what you wrote earlier, you became aware of slightly different perspectives on the relationship between 'common sense' and 'academic' reflection. This is one of the key points to make about reflective writing, I think: the process of writing itself can be a form of reflection, and rewriting even more so. As you cast around for the words appropriate to your task you often come across new associations, new ideas, new dimensions to the topic.

5.4 The role of reflection in A150's assessment

As I have said, reflective writing will play a significant role in your assignments for A150. The guidance notes in the Assignment Booklet give more detail about the basis for this assessment, but the main principle to be emphasised here is in the wording of learning outcome 10, which talks about 'the constructive use of reflection'. As usual in an academic context, reflection is angled towards specific purposes – it should help you to do certain things differently (maybe better), lead you towards deeper insights and understandings, and generally aid the learning process. The criteria for assessing your reflective writing will be based on this sense of purpose.

Purpose is, in fact, central to all assessment criteria, whatever the task, so reflective writing is in this sense no different. As you work through A150, you should aim to approach each assessment task with an appropriate sense of purpose, whether you are constructing a wiki with other students, producing a formal essay, engaging in a piece of creative writing, or writing as part of reflection. When it comes to the examination, that awareness of purpose will still be relevant, even though you will be writing in more of a hurry! No one expects the quality of written work produced in an exam to equal that of your best assignment writing, but you can still achieve good standards of clarity and relevance if you keep in mind the purpose behind each question you answer. You will be offered plenty of guidance, when the time comes, about preparing for your A150 exam, but I have deliberately not included this material in the Study Companion, as it seems to me premature. As mentioned in Section 2.5, you will be able to access information and guidance on the A150 website about how best to approach the exam. For now, you just need to note that reflection will continue to be a valuable learning tool as you prepare for the exam, as well as throughout the continuous assessment.

6 Key concepts and processes

As you work through this section you will be starting to focus on learning outcome 3:

- You will have developed your understanding of different methodological approaches to the concepts ‘voices’ and ‘texts’.

You have already given some thought, especially in Section 3, to some of the key concepts that shape A150, and recognised that different academic disciplines may take differing approaches to them. Here we will briefly extend the discussion to include some further recurring topics you will encounter as you work through A150, again with the particularities of different academic subjects in mind.

6.1 The overarching concepts

We already have ‘language’, ‘voices’ and ‘texts’ in our sights as central topics underpinning A150 as a whole. The titles of A150’s three books provide us with a further clutch of ideas that will be explored in considerable detail: authority; identity and expression; dialogue. I will not pre-empt the discussions in Books 1, 2 and 3 by attempting to open up these particular terms right now. But I should just mention that they are not going to be kept in watertight compartments: ‘dialogue’, for example, can have discipline-specific meanings that will be explored in Book 2 before it features as a more general thematic idea in Book 3.

If we were to try to organise the concepts relevant to A150 in a hierarchical way, what we have so far would give us three layers:

- 1 Language (overarching everything)
- 2 Voices and texts (key topics that provide the scaffolding for each book)
- 3 Authority; identity and expression; dialogue (recurring themes, with a particular ‘organising’ function for the three books respectively).

6.2 Further concepts and processes

There are also a number of other ideas that run through A150, sometimes deliberately foregrounded for discussion, but sometimes present in an implicit rather than an explicit way. Some of these ideas are more like processes than static concepts, and several of the process-

You will need access to a computer for this section of the Study Companion.

words apply not just to A150's subject matter but also to what you are doing as you study and write. The topics for the previous two sections of the Study Companion provide good examples: collaboration and reflection. Both these terms, or variants of them, will recur as you work through A150, sometimes in different contexts. And in fact 'context' is another prominent idea, forming part of the familiar phrase 'text and context'.

The list of process- or concept-words that you are likely to come across at various points includes:

- collaboration
- reflection
- context
- audience
- communication
- culture
- discourse
- genre
- narrative
- translation (and/or adaptation).

Many of these terms cross discipline boundaries, and although you will gain more precise understandings of how they are used in specific contexts as A150 progresses, the next activity points you towards a reference tool that will help you to find definitions for yourself.

Activity

In this activity you will use the online facilities of the OU Library, so you need to find your way from StudentHome to the Library homepage. The steps are:

- 1 Click on the 'Study Support' tab at the top of StudentHome.
- 2 Select 'Library Services' in the 'Services' section to take you to the Library.
- 3 From there, click on the 'Collections' tab at the top of the page.
- 4 When the list of collections appears on the left of the page, select 'Reference'.
- 5 The particular reference collection we're going to use is 'Oxford Reference Online', so click on this link, answering 'yes' to the security

warning dialogue box in order to move through onto the Oxford University Press site.

As you'll see, Oxford Reference Online draws together the resources of over a hundred Oxford University Press reference titles, such as dictionaries of various subjects. The coverage for Arts and Humanities is good, so this is a handy tool for finding out about how particular words and concepts are used across a range of disciplines. For the next stage in our activity, choose what for you is one of the least familiar terms from the bulleted list above, and type it into the 'search' box on the Oxford Reference Online page. Once you click 'Go' you should find a quick, general definition of the word, followed by a long list of more specialised definitions from reference works relating to various academic subjects. Not all of these will be relevant to our purposes here, but as you scan the list, try consciously to make connections with what you already know, using the reference material selectively in order to build on what seems most familiar to you.

Discussion

I hope you found this reference tool helpful. There is always a risk of feeling overwhelmed when trying to pick a way through reference materials of any kind, but probably the best way to keep on track is, as I suggested above, to look for links with things you might already know about. My own choice for this activity was 'discourse', because it is a word that I know is used across many different subject areas, but for me some of these usages come into the category of 'known unknowns', in Donald Rumsfeld's famous phrase (2002). As I scrolled down the list of definitions, I found the single term 'discourse' being incorporated into longer phrases, including 'discourse analysis'. This reminded me that I've often felt a bit uncertain when I've heard colleagues in Social Sciences talking about discourse analysis, and in a spirit of curiosity I did dip briefly into some of these entries. But this was taking me into rather specialised areas, so once I felt I was starting to lose my bearings I went back to entries that looked more relevant to Arts and Humanities, where the language was more familiar to me. Even there, I was aware of the very wide range of meanings attaching to 'discourse': in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* it is defined as 'any coherent succession of sentences, spoken or (in most usage) written', while the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology* stretches the concept to include 'not simply the content of what is said or shown [but] ... also the conceptual, social, and historical conditions behind the statements made'.

I've described my search in some detail to illustrate the 'browsing' effect that can operate just as much when using online materials as it does when looking at books in a library or bookshop: it can often be a very

productive process. But there are other useful features of Oxford Reference Online. You may have noticed that, once you'd selected your chosen word, a list of subject areas appeared on the left-hand side of the page showing the number of hits for your word alongside each subject. This gives a good snapshot of the cross-disciplinary range of certain terms: for example, 'discourse' scored quite a few hits under 'Politics and Social Sciences', but even more under 'English Language Reference'. Once we identify the fields in which our search-term features prominently, we are on the way to making the links by which we gradually build up our knowledge.

The OU Library is a tremendous online resource that can support you in your studies in all kinds of ways. You may already have identified specific reference tools that work well for you, but, if not, it would certainly be worthwhile doing some further browsing. However, if you simply want to check the meaning of specialised terms you encounter in the course of A150, your first recourse will probably be the glossaries at the end of each book.

So we have now added a fourth layer to the hierarchy of concepts outlined at the beginning of this section, and you may find yourself identifying more significant concepts as you continue your studies. The important thing is to keep an eye open for connections, familiarising yourself gradually with some of the new concepts you encounter, and deepening your understanding of more familiar ones. This way you will be building up really strong foundations for further study in the Arts and Humanities.

7 Reflecting on the first week's work

Now that you are approaching the end of your first study week on A150, you might take the opportunity to look back over the ground you have covered in this Study Companion, and begin to practise the kind of reflection outlined in Section 5. The following activity is designed to prompt you to think about outcomes.

You will need access to a computer for this section of the Study Companion.

Activity

Return to your tutor-group forum on the A150 website, and post a short message there telling your fellow students what for you has been the most useful, surprising or thought-provoking thing you have learned this week (i.e. focus on a particular outcome). This might also be a good opportunity to follow up any queries you might have about the material you've been studying, by posting a question to the forum.

Discussion

As part of your reflection, you might think about how you now view your tutor-group forum. The K101 student quoted in Section 4.2 talked about the forums giving a 'sense of community'. If you feel that this is something that would help you in your studies, consider how you might contribute to this community. Good advice can be found by following the 'Using your PC for Study' link on StudentHome, then selecting 'Online forums' and 'How to help a forum to work'.

7.1 Following-up

Reflection in an academic context, as noted above, often leads to a 'change of behaviour' (Section 5.2). Think of one or more things you might do to change your study techniques for the better, and/or help you prepare more thoroughly for the substantive work on A150 that begins when you move on to Book 1 next week. Here are a few suggestions that may trigger ideas for you:

- Select one or two of the key concepts listed in Section 6 and make some notes to try to pin down what your present understanding of that concept is, and what you feel unsure about.
- Set up a personal link from the bottom-left corner of your StudentHome page to the OU Library.

- Check on the dates of tutorials (and possibly day schools) for your tutor-group, and customise your study map by writing in these dates, along with the assignment cut-off dates.
- Send a 'dummy' assignment (TMA 00) to your tutor, to check that the eTMA system will run smoothly for you.
- Consider the pros and cons of keeping a learning journal. You can find a relevant section on the 'Skills for OU Study' section of StudentHome: go to 'Develop effective study strategies', then under 'Reflect and review' click on 'Keeping a reflective learning journal'.

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Study Companion

This Study Companion introduces you to A150 *Voices and texts*, and shapes your first week's work. Section 1 contains some practical advice to get you started, and Section 2 is the Module guide, which provides important information about the module as a whole, such as its learning outcomes. In Section 3 you will approach the module's key terms, 'voices' and 'texts', through a variety of activities. Sections 4 and 5 are devoted to learning processes that feature prominently in A150: working with others and learning from reflection. Section 6 identifies several more recurring concepts that run through the module, and Section 7 turns the spotlight back on your own approaches to study. After this you will be ready to launch into the first book of A150, *The Voices and Texts of Authority*.

